



The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

University APPG meeting- Universities in a Global Britain

18:00 – 19:30, Wednesday 24 April, Committee Room 2, House of Lords

Chair:

Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP, Chair of the APPUG

Speakers:

Graham Stuart MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Department for International Trade

Dr Erik Lithander, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Global), University of Bristol

Daniel Shah, Director of Research, British Council

Graham Stuart opened his remarks by praising the higher education sector for its impressive economic figures in terms of exports alongside enormous soft power benefits. He criticised negative media coverage of Britain's strong trading sectors and noted the UK's intellectual fireworks and drivers of innovation that were fundamental to the future of the economy.

Further denouncing widespread negativity, he stated that Forbes had named the UK as the best place to do business in the world; the UK attracted more foreign direct investment (FDI), including greenfield and mergers, than any other country in Europe. Education was a services sector and exported more than any other nation aside from the United States, he said stating his joy at having so many great universities in the country.

Turning to specific facts about higher education as an exporting sector he said all but 15 of the world's countries received some sort of transnational education service from UK universities. 67% of the £20bn of education exports came from higher education, much of which was from the 442,000 international students studying in the country.

Although the UK was doing well he thought the country was potentially falling short of its potential, especially considering the growing middle classes in South and East Asia which represented a seismic shift in economic power. The UK's relative success in exporting education had to be looked at in terms of the wider market so as to avoid the 'tipping point' whereby the country's offer was no longer competitive. The number of students looking to study abroad globally was growing and therefore the government had set out its ambition to capitalise on that in its International Education Strategy. This included 6 months post-study work experience for undergraduates and 12 months for PhD students.

Almost 710,000 students were enrolled on Transnational Education (TNE) programmes outside of the UK in 2016/17, representing an increase of 10% on the previous year, he said. Turning back to the International Education Strategy, he stressed the government's ambition to make the UK the international partner of choice for global education partnerships, but noted that universities rather than the government needed to be at the forefront of these efforts.

Graham Stuart noted the higher levels of cooperation that could be seen between the Education Secretary Damian Hinds and his colleagues in the Department for International Trade and said across the government there was enthusiasm to champion UK education to reach its full global exporting potential. He concluded by saying the education sector brought in serious money, but also did serious good, bringing prosperity to the UK and the rest of the world.

Dr Erik Lithander stressed that the university sector is an enthusiastic partner in the drive for economic prosperity and noted regretfully there was little talk about UK higher education in its own right as a world leading industry that could play a role in consolidating Britain's reputation and identity. Universities' potential as job creators and a value-adding sector armed with soft diplomacy tools was insufficiently understood, and he thought this was perhaps due both to political distractions and the universities themselves being poor at celebrating their own cause.

He compared the governmental support for higher education in the UK with that in Australia; there was unwavering support in Australia across different prime ministers and a stable environment for student visas and post-study work rights. Internationalisation of the sector was an undoubtedly good thing; UK students that spend time abroad had disproportionately performed better in their degrees and had superior employment outcomes, and were uniquely qualified to conduct business across countries and languages.

Dr Lithander then turned to the benefits of internationalisation in terms of innovation, research and enterprise. The consequential knock-on effects of international students for the national and local economies were clear he said, then quoted an Oxford Economics survey which showed they create £25bn for economy and student spending alone supports 200,000 local jobs.

There had been a failure to appreciate that international graduates are not principally interested in settling down in the UK; they rather want a small amount of UK-based work experience. This in itself leads to familiarity with the UK's industries, business culture and development of personal and professional networks that lasted a lifetime. He thought that using international students as a political football was relatively pointless as the public did not view student as migrants. He advocated for introducing two years of post-study work rights as a mechanism for catapulting the UK into genuine contention for the brightest and most ambitious students in the world. Making the international education strategy a success would be a great starting point he concluded.

Daniel Shah thought that in many respects universities embodied 'global Britain' as almost 20% of students were from overseas and the UK had the most students studying through TNE. He thought the international element of higher education had tremendous breadth, and spoke about the higher numbers of overseas postgraduate students and the fact over half of research was already carried out with an international collaborate. For research there was a "massive efficiency gain" when the UK worked with the best people internationally.

He thought the UK should be proud of its quality, surveys showed it was first in the world in terms of international students recommending study in the country and their satisfaction levels. He noted that not only was achieving exports targets important in terms of income, but also the jobs that universities created were more evenly distributed than service industries. Daniel also stressed there were benefits for UK students studying amongst international peers, especially given that future labour market changes were likely to mean more people working in international teams.

The relationship between internationalisation and soft power was not a trade off with export success he said, telling attendees that a 1% increase in the footprint of international cultural institutions like the British Council resulted in a 3-4% increase in international students coming to the UK. He then spoke about the link between trust and the likelihood of studying in the UK and said that universities embodied many attractive features of the UK. Features like world leading culture, a good justice system and a welcoming atmosphere were important he said and stressed that young people were usually the best ambassadors.

He concluded by saying that children that were young during the first phase of sustainable development goals (SDGs) were now at tertiary education age and that talent was randomly distributed across the world. The international education strategy was a start but our success could not be taken for granted.